

Additional notes on the eggs of the Giant Cowbird

by F. HAVERSCHMIDT

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In my previous note on this subject (*Bull. B.O.C.* 86, 1966: 144-147) most of my own records of the eggs of the Giant Cowbird (*Scaphidura oryzivora*) pertained to those found in nests of *Psarocolius decumanus*.

I have now additional information on eggs of this parasite in nests of *Cacicus cela*.

Mr. Th. Renssen found a small colony of *Cacicus cela* at Spieringshoek plantation, Surinam, on 2nd April, 1967, which he inspected in spite of the presence of a large wasps' nest in the middle of it. The colony proved heavily parasitised by *Scaphidura*. Though the total number of nests of *Cacicus* was not specified, I received 12 eggs of *Scaphidura* and four of *Cacicus*.

Apart from eggs in all stages of incubation there was also a number of nestlings of the parasite and I received a nearly full fledged nestling of *Scaphidura* (now preserved in the Leiden Museum) which was the sole occupant of one of the nests. Four nests each contained two eggs of the parasite and two of the host; the remaining nests one egg of the parasite and two of the host. All 12 eggs of *Scaphidura* were of a pale blue ground colour with a few small black spots and hair-lines. In shape they differed a great deal, for eight of them were elliptical and four oval. The 12 eggs averaged 32.5 x 26.3 mm., the largest 35.3 x 25.4 and 32.5 x 28mm.,



Left Row: Two eggs of *Cacicus cela*

Centre Row: Three eggs of *Scaphidura oryzivora* from nests of *Cacicus cela*

Right Row: Egg of *Psarocolius decumanus* (top)

Two eggs of *Scaphidura* from nests of *Psarocolius decumanus* (centre and lower)

the smallest 30.2 x 26.9 and 34.3 x 25.1 mm. The weight of six unblown fresh eggs was 9.7—12.6 grams (average 11.7 grams.).

Four eggs of the host *Cacicus cela* had a white ground colour with blackish spots and hair-lines; they averaged 27.3 x 18.7 mm.

It is very interesting that all the eggs of *Scaphidura* in this colony of *Cacicus cela* were in colour as well as in shape totally different from the white eggs of *Scaphidura* in nests of *Psarocolius decumanus* described in my earlier notes. As up till now white eggs of *Scaphidura* seem to be unknown from nests of *Cacicus* and blue eggs of the parasite practically unknown from nests of *Psarocolius* (only Smooker mentions them but his records seem not wholly satisfactory) I feel inclined to the view that the statement made by the Penard brothers as long ago as 1910, that the eggs of *Scaphidura* in nests of *Cacicus* are different from those laid in nests of *Psarocolius* is indeed correct, and is in my opinion a most interesting fact of brood parasitism.

Further observations will be necessary to see if blue and more rounded eggs of the parasite are indeed confined to *Cacicus cela* and white more elongated eggs to nests of *Psarocolius decumanus*.

Cisticola aberdare a good species

by MELVIN A. TRAYLOR

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In July 1966, at the 14th International Ornithological Congress at Oxford, Mr. Myles North presented a paper supported by tape recordings of the songs of different populations of some species of African birds. Among those were the songs of *Cisticola robusta ambigua* of the Kenya highlands and *C. "robusta" aberdare* from high altitudes on both sides of the Rift Valley in Kenya. On the basis of striking differences in voice plus the fact that both occurred in close proximity at Molo on the western side of the Rift, North believed that *aberdare* should be considered a distinct species and not a race of *robusta*. Examination of a series of skins from the National (formerly Coryndon) Museum of Nairobi, collected at Molo, shows that North was quite correct in his belief, and that the two species occur at Molo without intergradation or evidence of interbreeding and may thus be considered sympatric at this locality.

In his original description of *aberdare*, Lynes (1930, *Ibis*, *Cisticola* Supp., p. 426) stated that it was similar in size to the surrounding *ambigua*, but darker in general colour like the summer plumage of nominate *robusta*. The most notable character was the colour of the tail, which, except for the buff tips, was so dark that the subterminal black spots disappeared, even when viewed from below.

Lynes had only four adults available for his original description. Examination of a fresh series of seven adult males and one adult female from Molo shows that there are other characters both of colour and size which distinguish *aberdare* from *ambigua*. One of the most marked specific characters of *robusta*, including the race *ambigua*, is the clear rusty nape, forming a reddish hind collar separating the streaked crown and back (see figure). In *aberdare* this hind collar virtually disappears, and the dark streaking of the hind crown extends down over the nape. In the winter